

Concerted Effort Necessary to Prevent Sprawl

By

U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY)

Our continued population growth is a reaffirmation of the Hudson Valley as a great place to live and work. But this expansion challenges us to find ways to grow gracefully; to plan our development better; to improve our transportation corridors and facilities; and to protect our agriculture, open spaces and environment. The *Times Herald Record's* recent series on sprawl described accurately and vividly the adverse consequences of ignoring these challenges or responding to them in the wrong ways. Economic development is certainly important for the Hudson Valley and I have worked hard to bring federal resources to our region. Unfortunately, however, development decisions are often made by individuals or small groups based upon their economic objectives and ratified by subsidiaries of local governments without giving careful enough consideration to long-term community needs.

Significant steps have already been taken to preserve and promote the Hudson Valley's unique regional identity. That was the goal I had in mind when I authored the state law that created the Hudson River Valley Greenway and the federal act that designated our region as a National Heritage Area. The Greenway initiative fosters regional planning and allows communities to work together more effectively. Building on that foundation, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area will emphasize the national importance of our region while helping to protect its historic character and natural beauty.

But there are many other ways in which Congress can help to fight sprawl. In addition to supporting stronger clean air and water laws and opposing efforts to allow developers to bypass local officials and land use procedures, I have cosponsored several simple measures that would promote appropriate economic development and protect our environment and regional identity.

One such measure would expand the Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Initiative. This program provides grants to assist in the redevelopment of abandoned industrial sites where reuse is hindered by environmental contamination. Redeveloped brownfields can serve as catalysts for economic growth while reducing our dependence on open space development. We should also create tax incentives for brownfields cleanup and other purposes, such as preserving green spaces and creating urban parks.

Another way of combating sprawl is to encourage the rehabilitation of the historic centers of our small cities. We should offer tax credits for historic home rehabilitation to make our cities more attractive. I also favor a plan to offer incentives for intercity passenger rail carriers by selling high-speed rail bonds. In addition, Congress should establish guidelines for the relocation, closing, consolidation, and construction of post

offices since they are often magnets for business activity. Through measures like these, we can maintain or reestablish our urban areas as commercial centers.

The farms of the Hudson Valley have played an integral role in the development of our region and we need to ensure their economic strength. As a member of the Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, I worked to ensure that funding was increased for programs that encourage farmers to protect sensitive land from development. This Congress should take the additional step of passing the Farmland Protection and Sprawl Reduction Act, an initiative to increase funding for farmland conservation.

Our citizens have grown tired of unplanned development and the "sprawl" it produces. They should support local leaders who are producing careful development strategies for long-term community benefits and encourage others to do the same. I will continue to do my part in the 107th Congress by looking for new ways to assist local communities. The Hudson Valley includes many independent and unique communities, but we must all work together to preserve our region's natural beauty, history and charm.